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Understanding the Relationship between Cynicism and Trust

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### Abstract

This article explores the nature of cynicism, its relationship to interpersonal trust, and how behavior influences the impact of cynicism on trust. We propose that cynicism represents an attitude composed of negative beliefs and feelings that influences individuals' perceptions of events and behavior, which in turn affect their trust. This process is likely to occur when situational cues are ambiguous. Three studies investigate this proposition. Using a projective task, Study 1 demonstrated that cynicism is associated with negative beliefs, feelings and a lack of trust. Study 2, a field survey, supported a mediating role for perceived events, measured in terms of met expectations, in the relationship between cynicism and trust. Study 3, an experiment in which we manipulated the trustworthy behavior of a referent, found that when the words and actions of others are clearly trustworthy or untrustworthy, cynicism has little influence on perceptions of trust, but when they are ambiguous, cynicism has a strong effect on the interpretation of behavior. The results indicate that cynicism biases interpretations of ambiguous events and behavior, thereby leading to lower trust but that strong trustworthy behavior mitigates the effect of cynicism on trust.

### Understanding the Relationship between Cynicism and Trust

Considering the benefits of trust, it is not surprising that executives want to engender trust among members of their organizations (Buzzotta, 1998). Both empirical research and conceptual reviews show that trusting supervisor-subordinate relationships improve communication, performance, cooperation, and success of organizational interventions (Colquitt, Brent, & Lepine, 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; 2002; Korsgaard, Pitariu & Jeong, in press).

Despite these benefits, managers often make decisions or act in ways that undermine employees' trust (Buch, 1992; Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998; Pugh, Skarlicki, & Passell, 2003). For instance, they lay off long-term employees (Buch, 1992; Pugh, et al., 2003; Van Buren, 2000) and jump on management fad bandwagons (Gibson & Tesone, 2001). As well, they take credit for their subordinates' ideas or publicly humiliate others (Lang, 1998). Actions like these are more likely to inflame cynicism and destroy trust than to engender it (Buch, 1992; Dean et al., 1998; Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998). Even management's attempts to initiate potentially beneficial organizational change may be received by employees with distrust and cynicism (Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1997; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000).

Managers' conduct and dealings with employees are crucial to developing and maintaining employee trust in management and goodwill toward the firm (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998). Much of the research on the formation and maintenance of trust in management has focused on attributes and behavior of managers (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Whitener, et al., 1998). In comparison, with the exception of propensity to trust (Colquitt, Scott, & Lepine, 2007), there is relatively little research on employee characteristics as predictors of employees' trust in managers (Mayer, et al., 1995). Because trust is a perceptual

phenomenon, employee characteristics are likely to play a critical role in determining the level of trust employees have in managers. One potentially important employee characteristic is cynicism, which is prevalent in as much as 48 percent of the US workforce (Mirvis & Kanter, 1991) and seems to be growing (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; Santich, 2003). We focus on cynicism not just because of its prevalence, however. Equally important is the commonly held belief that cynicism somehow interferes with attempts to build trust, combined with the general lack of empirical research to substantiate this claim.

The purpose of our paper is to examine the concept of cynicism and its relationship to trust. In particular, we clarify the nature of cynicism and its distinctness from trust, the mechanisms by which cynicism relates to trust, and the effect of managers' behavior on the relationship between cynicism and trust. We explore these issues in three studies. Study 1 examines the nature of cynicism, and the relationship between cynicism and perceptions of people and events. Using a projection paradigm (Butcher & Rouse, 1996; Stone, 1978), we study the relationship between cynicism, and beliefs, feelings, expectations, and trust, in the context of a hypothetical situation. Study 2 extends this examination to the relationships among cynicism, work perceptions, and trust among a sample of credit union employees. Finally, study 3 experimentally tests the effects of a key aspect of trustworthy behavior – i.e., open communication – on the relationship between cynicism and trust. A subset of managers from study 2 participated in this experiment.

### Cynicism and the Perception of People and Events

Cynicism is an attitude or disposition that involves frustration, disillusionment and negative feelings toward a person, group, or organization (Andersson & Bateman, 1997). As this definition shows, cynicism has been alternately conceptualized as a trait (e.g., Wrightsman,

1992) or an attitude (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989). Among organizational psychologists, (e.g., Andersson, 1996; Dean et al., 1998; Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003) cynicism is viewed as a learned, relatively enduring but changeable attitude stemming from one’s experiences of disappointment and even betrayal of expectations by others, society, and even oneself (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989). Consistent with this view, we define cynicism as a relatively enduring attitude. As such, cynicism shares many features of current conceptions of attitudes, namely stable, memory-based evaluations as well as less stable evaluations constructed “online” as events occur (Albarracin, Johnson & Zanna, 2005). Moreover, definitions conceptualize the target of cynicism broadly as well as narrowly; for example, cynicism has been directed at a particular entity, such as an organization, at its leaders, at organizational change, and even at US business in general (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Bateman, Sakano & Fujita, 1992; Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003; Reichers et al., 1997). In this investigation, we examine both generalized and specific forms of cynicism.

Cynicism has both cognitive and affective elements (Dean et al., 1998). Specifically, it reflects negative beliefs (cognitions; Gurtman, 1992; Wrightsman, 1992) as well as negative feelings (affect; Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Dean et al., 1998) about the target of cynicism. For example, cynics hold negative beliefs about a target’s integrity (Dean, et al., 1998; Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003) and motives and character (Wanous et al., 2000). Similarly, Wanous et al (2000) found that cynicism was negatively related to employees’ instrumentality beliefs; that is employees’ beliefs about the link between performance and rewards. Thus, like current conceptions of attitudes (Albarracin, Zanna, Johnson, & Kumkale, 2005; Breckler, 1984; Zanna & Rempel, 1988), cynicism can be inferred from (and influence) affect and cognition.

As the above discussion suggests, cynicism is associated with certain unfavorable beliefs and feelings, which relate to the way individuals view and interpret situations. In other words, cynicism is likely to bias individuals' perceptions of events and people that might otherwise be viewed more favorably. An analogous process is described in the phenomenon of social projection (Kreuger, 2000). Social projection involves the transference or (mis)attribution of one's own motives, feelings and traits to others, quite unknowingly. Demonstrations of social projection typically involve assessing or priming a characteristic of interest and providing a neutral stimulus that participants then evaluate. For example, in a series of studies, Kawada et al. (2004) showed that individuals are more likely to impute certain motives (e.g., learning, performance, or competition goals) to hypothetical persons when the corresponding goals were either primed or indicated as prevalent.

Social projection can also involve projecting the *source* of one's own emotional state onto others (Holmes, 1981). Individuals who are in a fearful state, for example, tend to evaluate photographs of neutral faces as indicating anger (Manner et al., 2005). It should be noted that social projection does not necessarily involve a defensive mechanism (i.e., projection of negative characteristics while denying these same characteristics in oneself). In fact, research on social cognition shows that one's own beliefs and feelings are often used as a proxy for others, especially when there is little basis for knowing how others think or feel (Brodt, 1987; Brodt & Ross, 1998; Locksley, Hepburn, & Ortiz, 1982).

In a similar vein, we propose that elements of cynicism may be projected. If, as the definitions of cynicism described above suggest, it involves certain affective and cognitive elements that may bias the perception of people and events, these thoughts and feelings should

be projected onto new and especially ambiguous situations. Specifically, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 1: Cynicism will be related to negative beliefs, feelings, toward the target.*

The relatively scant empirical work indicates that there is a strong, negative correlation between cynicism and trust (Gurtman, 1992; Pugh et al., 2003; Wrightsman, 1966). However, theory suggests that cynicism and interpersonal trust are conceptually distinct (Dean et al., 1998). As discussed above, cynicism is an attitude involving negative beliefs and feelings. Trust, however, is commonly defined as an attitude or belief involving a positive expectation about a target and willingness to make oneself vulnerable to that target (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998; Whitener, et al., 1998). Thus, whereas individuals can trust only when they are vulnerable to another party, they can be cynical without being vulnerable (Dean et al., 1998).

While conceptually distinct, theory suggests that cynicism and trust should be related. Specifically, because of its accessibility and its affective and cognitive elements, cynicism might negatively influence one's attributions and judgments of the target (Wanous et al., 2000). In other words, cynicism's negative perceptual frame or orientation may bias the processing of information regarding the target other. As a result, persons high in cynicism may be prone to unfavorable interpretations which are likely to lead to mistrust of the target. It is also possible, however, that trust and cynicism are reciprocally related in that mistrust in a manager may bias the interpretation of an event (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), which may reinforce cynicism. Therefore we posit a relationship between cynicism and trust:

*Hypothesis 2: Cynicism will be negatively related to trust.*

In study 1, we tested these hypotheses focusing on cynicism as an attitude (Dean et al., 1998), and more particularly, as a learned belief stored in memory about a specific target or situation. Cynicism is a response to the experience of disappointment (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989), and depending on their experiences, individuals develop cynicism toward specific entities such as organizations, organizational leaders, organizational change, US business in general, and society (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Bateman, et al., 1992; Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Mirvis & Kanter, 1989; 1991; Reichers et al., 1997). Because participants in study 1 were students, our focus was on cynicism toward student groups. These participants had sufficient experience with student group project work to have formed an attitude toward this specific target. In light of the prevalence of teams in the workplace, the influence of cynicism on cooperative behavior (Johnson & O-Leary-Kelly, 2003), and evidence that group-level trust affects group dynamics and work attitudes (e.g., Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Langfred, 2004), we believe that understanding the nature of cynicism about work groups is of practical and theoretical importance.

## Study 1

### *Method*

*Participants and procedure.* Data were collected as part of a larger study on group dynamics. Participants were advanced undergraduate students enrolled in the core curriculum of the business program at a university in the southeastern USA. As part of the course, all 320 enrolled students were required to participate in research as part of a student subject pool. To receive credit for participation, they signed up for three studies among several research opportunities offered that year. Of the possible 320 subjects, 229 volunteered for our project and completed the survey; of these, 208 had codable responses to the projective task. At the time of



the study, each student was a member of a five-person team working on a complex, semester-long group project; hence, all participants were in the middle of a meaningful group experience.

Participants completed a confidential web-based survey. The survey contained two parts: (1) fixed response items measuring several variables, including a measure of cynicism about work groups and demographic characteristics, and (2) a projective task designed to tap into participants' beliefs, feelings, and expectations about work groups. Upon completion of the survey, participants clicked on a button that saved their responses for later downloading by the experimenters.

*Measures.* Cynicism was measured using a modified version of the 8-item cynicism toward organizational change scale (created and validated by Reichers et al, 1997, and Wanous et al., 2000). We altered the wording of the cynicism measure to describe cynicism toward working in student groups (coefficient alpha = .88). Sample items include "Most student group projects usually do not turn out that well," "Ideas generated in student groups do not usually produce much real value," "Members of student groups usually do not try hard enough to do their part of the project," and "Members of student groups usually do not know enough about what they are doing."

To tap into participants' beliefs and feelings about work groups, we employed a projective technique similar to that used in research on social projection (e.g. Kawada et al. 2004). In keeping with this methodology, we presented participants with a neutral stimulus. Specifically, the web survey contained a photograph of an unfamiliar work group with instructions to describe what was occurring in the group (See Appendix). In social projection research, participants' evaluations of the stimulus are often obtained in the form of fixed response ratings. Given that cynicism was measured using a fixed response format, we opted to

use an open ended format to minimize the potential for common method bias. Thus, participants entered their descriptions into an expandable text box in the web survey. The responses were then content coded.

Consistent with attitude theory, cynicism is conceptualized to consist of three components, cognitive, affective and behavioral. We coded participants' responses for the cognitive and affective components. The narrative did not allow for an assessment of participants' behavioral intentions because they were describing the actions of others, not themselves. These coding scales for cognitive and affective components were developed and refined using pilot responses to the photograph. The cognitive scale measured the extent to which participants' projections reflected *negative beliefs about others* (e.g., questioning the motives and intention of group members). Using a 5-point scale, raters assessed the overall degree of negative inferences and beliefs about the individuals in the photograph expressed in each participant's narrative (1 = *conveys no negative assumptions*, 5 = *conveys very negative assumptions*). The affective scale measured the extent to which the stories conveyed *negative feelings*, using a 5-point scale (1 = *does not convey negative emotions*, 5 = *conveys very negative emotions*).

Two trained raters, who were blind to the hypotheses, made independent assessments. The intraclass correlation coefficients indicated an acceptable level of agreement between the raters (negative beliefs: ICC = .28; negative feelings: ICC = .31). The coders' ratings were averaged to form a separate index for each dimension (i.e. negative beliefs, negative feelings, and expectations).

Finally, trust was measured by a two item scale by asking participants to assess the extent to which they trusted their student project groups, using a 7-point scale (e.g., "I find it difficult to

completely trust my group.” Reverse coded;  $\alpha = .73$ ). Unlike our assessment of participants’ cynicism on negative beliefs feelings, and expectations about a hypothetical group (i.e., the projective task), we measured trust derived from actual direct experience. Therefore, we assessed participants’ trust in a similar but actual group. At the time of data collection, participants had been working in student groups for approximately 6 weeks and were to continue working together for 6 weeks until the end of the semester.

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 Insert Table 1 about here  
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### *Results*

Descriptive statistics (see Table 1) provide preliminary evidence that group cynicism is related to negative feelings or a negative view about groups, and that trust in the group and cynicism toward groups are significantly and negatively related. Regression results, controlling for sex, age, and minority/non-minority membership supported for Hypothesis 1. Specifically, cynicism was significantly related to both negative beliefs about group members ( $B = .12$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t_{201} = 2.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and to negative feelings ( $B = .13$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t_{201} = 2.81$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Hypothesis 2 was also supported: group cynicism was significantly and negatively related to initial trust in the group ( $B = -.90$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t_{201} = -8.61$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

### *Discussion*

The primary purpose of study 1 was to clarify the nature of cynicism by examining its relationship to perceptions of neutral or ambiguous situations. Using a projective methodology, the results suggest that cynicism is associated with ascribing certain feelings and thoughts to others. Specifically, individuals high in cynicism projected negative beliefs (e.g., questioning

the motives of group members) onto a hypothetical work team situation and negative feelings (e.g., hostility, dislike) about group members. Thus, when presented with ambiguous stimuli, persons high in cynicism appear to approach new situations with a negative view. Additionally, cynicism toward work groups was negatively associated with participants' trust in an actual group to which they belonged.

A secondary purpose of this study was to apply the attitude of cynicism to a new domain, namely groups. In doing so, we adapted a measure of specific cynicism (i.e., cynicism toward organizational change) to apply to teams. Our findings, which are consistent previous findings regarding the relationship between cynicism and trust in other domains (e.g., Andersson, 1996; Dean et al., 1998; Johnson & O'Leary-Kelly, 2003), provide support for the validity of the cynicism in this specific domain.

One of the important implications of the findings of study 1 is that cynicism may promote a form of perceptual bias that undermines trust. That is, the negative view with which cynics approach new situations may bias their perception of subsequent events, resulting in unfavorable assessments of the actors involved. Thus, the relationship between cynicism and trust may stem from the mindset of cynics when perceiving and evaluating a target. These relationships suggest possible mediation, such that cynicism influences how unfavorably individuals perceive and interpret their experiences with the target, which in turn influences trust in that target. These implications were not testable in Study 1 because participants' perceptions were directed at a hypothetical group, whereas the measure of trust was targeted at an actual group. One of the purposes of Study 2, therefore, was to examine the potential mediated relationship between cynicism, perception, and trust by assessing perceptions and trust with regard to the same experience.

Specifically, in Study 2, we focus the on linkages between employee cynicism, the favorableness of the perceptions of their work experiences and trust. In terms of their work experiences, we focus on met expectations – the extent to which they believe the organization has fulfilled its promises to the employee – which has been previously linked to trust (Young & Perrewe, 2000). Research suggests that employees high in cynicism are likely to believe that the organization and its leadership have not fulfilled it promises. For example, Wanous, Reichers, and Austin (2004) demonstrated that cynicism is associated with a tendency to attribute failures in organizational change efforts to leaders. Further, in a separate study, they (Wanous, et al. 2000) showed that cynicism was negatively related to beliefs about the contingency between pay and performance (i.e., probabilistic beliefs about performance-outcome linkage). These data suggest that persons high in cynicism will interpret events in a manner that confirms their negative beliefs and feelings, such that the promised or hoped for outcomes are perceived as unfulfilled. Further, such interpretations may ultimately lead to unfavorable evaluations of leaders as untrustworthy. In Study 2, therefore, we examined this possibility by focusing on the linkages between employees' cynicism and their perceptions of met expectations on the job and trust.

#### Cynicism, Met Expectations, and Trust

Research on met expectations is based on the notion that individuals enter an organization with certain expectations about aspects of the organization (e.g., job content, pay and promotion, etc; Porter & Steers, 1973) as well as about their experiences (Hom et al, 1998). The extent to which these expectations are fulfilled is an important predictor of job attitudes and turnover (Wanous, Poland, Premack, & Davis, 1992). We do not expect cynicism to be related to the *level* or type of individuals' expectations. Employee expectations may be derived external

sources, information obtained about the organization, as well as from internal standards, such as deservingness, that are likely to be unrelated to cynicism. That is, persons who are high in cynicism are not any more likely to believe that they deserve less or are promised less than are persons who are low in cynicism. Rather, we propose that cynicism is related to the belief that expectations and promises are not fulfilled.

Research suggests that perceptions of met expectations are largely driven by perceptions of work experiences, rather than to initial expectations (Irving & Meyer, 1997). The negative feelings and beliefs associated with cynicism are likely to shape interpretations of work experiences, leading to perceptions of unmet expectations. That is, cynicism should be associated with biased perception of information and experiences pertaining to promise fulfillment. Specifically, negative beliefs and affect associated with a cynical attitude should trigger intentional (versus heuristic) information processing, meaning that individuals focus attention to specific behavior and events (Barry, Fulmer, & Goates, 2006; Forgas, 1995; 2001), and the focus is likely to be on affect-consistent (i.e., negative) aspects of behavior and events. Not only are they likely to selectively attend to information that is consistent with their feelings, as the findings of Study 1 suggest, persons high in cynicism are also likely to interpret ambiguous events in a manner that is consistent with their attitude.

Because we expect cynicism to bias the interpretation of events, it should color perceptions of current work conditions such that individuals high in cynicism feel promises and expectations were unfulfilled. The net result of the proposed biased processing associated with cynicism is that individuals high in cynicism should be more likely to perceive that their expectations and promises of the job are unfulfilled. We therefore hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 3: Employee cynicism will be negatively related to met expectations.*

As noted previously and indicated in Study 1, cynicism is negatively associated with trust. We posit that this relationship is mediated by perceptions of their experiences with the target. Because individuals high in cynicism tend to attribute unfavorable outcomes to the organization (Wanous et al., 2000) and its lack of integrity (Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003), they are likely to blame the organization and its management for these unmet expectations. This sort of attribution is likely to lead to a sense of violation (Morrison & Robinson, 1997), which in turn will undermine trust in the management (Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003; Robinson, 1996). Consistent with this view, Young and Perrewé (2000) found that unmet expectations were negatively associated with trust.

In sum, we expect that employees’ interpretation of their organizational experiences, as captured by unmet expectations, will mediate the relationship between cynicism and trust. This hypothesis is predicated on the negative relationship between cynicism and trust observed in Study 1. We therefore hypothesize the following:

*Hypothesis 4: The negative relationship between employee cynicism and trust will be mediated by met expectations such that cynicism will be negatively related to met expectations, which in turn will be positively related to trust.*

## Study 2

### *Method*

*Participants and procedure.* As part of a larger study on trust and employee morale, participants completed a questionnaire distributed to all full time and part time workers employed by one of three credit unions located in the Southeast and Rocky Mountain regions of the US. All questionnaires included a stamped envelope that participants could use to mail the completed form directly to the researchers. Response rates at the three credit unions were 80% at

Site 1, 41% at Site 2, and 37% at Site 3 (where surveys were mailed to participants' homes) resulting in an overall response rate of 56% or 242 participants. Participants completed a survey containing questions measuring cynicism, unmet expectations, trust-in-their manager, their observations of the trustworthy behavior of their managers, and demographic items.

Of the 242 participants, the majority (89%) of our sample worked for their credit union full time. On average, participants were 38 years old and had worked for the company an average of 5 years. The majority of participants were female (75%) and Caucasian (87%); 5% of the sample was African-American, 4% was Hispanic, 3% was Native American, 1% was Asian, and 1% indicated "other." Forty-five percent of participants had completed a bachelors degree or higher

*Measures.* As much as possible, we used established scales. Within larger categories, we randomly ordered items. Except as indicated responses were based on a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). We averaged scores to form scales. We measured cynicism with the organizational cynicism scale developed by Kanter and Mirvis (1989). The coefficient alpha with this sample was .85. We measured perceptions of met expectations with the two-item scale developed by Robinson (1996). The coefficient alpha was .87. We measured trust-in-manager using a 3-item global trust scale adapted from the Conditions of Trust Inventory (Butler, 1991). The coefficient alpha was .94.

Following previous research (e.g., Robinson, 1996; Rotter, 1967), we included the participant's gender and tenure with the manager as control variables for all analyses.

Note that because the data were obtained from three credit union organizations, there was potential dependence in the data. Using hierarchical linear modeling, we estimated the effect of company on the key variables (trust, cynicism and met expectations) and found no significant



effect of company. We therefore opted to conduct the analyses using OLS regression. As a safeguard, we reran the analyses using HLM so as to control for the effect of company and obtained the same pattern of results as are reported below.

### *Results*

Means, standard deviations and correlations for all variables measured in Study 2 are listed in Table 2.

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Insert Table 2 about here  
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The hypotheses were tested using hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the results of which are reported in Table 3. Hypothesis 3 predicted that employee cynicism would be negatively related to met expectations. This hypothesis was tested by regressing met expectations on cynicism while controlling for gender and tenure with the manager (Step 2 of Column A). As predicted, there was a significant and negative relationship between cynicism and met expectations ( $B = -.27$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $t = -3.51$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

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Insert Table 3 about here  
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Hypothesis 4 predicted that the relationship between cynicism and trust would be mediated by met expectations. We assessed the following three conditions that have been identified to establish mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986): (a) a significant relationship between the independent variable (cynicism) and the mediating variable (met expectations), (b) a significant relationship between the mediator (met expectations) and the dependent variable

(trust-in-supervisor), and (c) evidence that a significant relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable becomes nonsignificant or substantially reduced when the mediator is added to the equation. The results of these analyses are reported in Table 3.

Additionally, we estimated and tested the indirect effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

The first condition of mediation was supported in that cynicism has a significant, negative relationship with met expectations ( $B = -.27$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $t = -3.51$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The second condition was also supported because met expectations was significantly related to trust ( $B = .64$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t = 8.57$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, the significant relationship between cynicism and trust in the manager ( $B = -.33$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t = -3.41$ ,  $p < .01$ ) is substantially reduced and nonsignificant when met expectations is added to the equation (Step 2, Column B:  $B = -.16$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t = 1.87$ , *n.s.*). This finding suggests full mediation and was supported by a significant indirect effect ( $B = -.017$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ ,  $t = 3.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

### *Discussion*

Study 2 focused on the relationship between employees' cynicism and trust in their managers. We proposed that the relationship between cynicism and trust could be explained by the manner in which cynicism shapes employees' attention to and interpretation of their work experiences. Arguing that the negative beliefs and affect associated with cynicism would negatively bias perceptions of work experiences, we hypothesized that cynicism to be negatively associated with met expectations. Moreover, we hypothesized that the relationship between cynicism and trust would be mediated perceptions of met expectations. Using a sample of employees from credit union organizations, we found support for both hypotheses.

This study was limited, however, by the use of cross-sectional self-report data, which poses two main problems of interpretation. First, such data raise questions about the causal

ordering of the variables. For example, given that cynicism is influenced by experience, met expectations (or the lack thereof) could have influenced cynicism rather than cynicism influencing met expectations as hypothesized. Second, because we did not assess initial expectation, it is unclear to what extent met expectations reflected differences in participants' perceptions of their work experiences and interactions with others, as hypothesized, or was driven by differences in actual experiences. Third, as in Study 1, cynicism and trust were measured cross-sectionally, so our ability to infer causal direction in this relationship was limited. To address these shortcomings, we conducted a third study, this time in the laboratory, in which we manipulated the actual experiences of participants and examined the extent to which reactions to these experiences were affected by cynicism.

#### Cynicism, Communication Behavior, and Trust

The two preceding studies suggest that cynicism affects individuals' interpretations of their experiences, and hence, their trust in others. More specifically, cynicism should influence how individuals interpret their interactions with other persons and consequently, their trust in these other persons. In study 3, we tested this idea by manipulating the behavior that research participants were exposed to in interactions with others and measuring their responses.

We sought to manipulate a behavior that individuals could readily observe in their interactions with another party. Further, this behavior should be of the sort that influences individuals' trust in the other party. We therefore focused on communication behavior, specifically, the openness of communication. We chose this behavior because it is overt and has been linked to perceptions of trust. Research suggests that managers' behavior, and in particular, their style in dealing with subordinates, exerts a strong influence on trust perceptions (Whitener, et al., 1998). Whitener, et al. (1998) identified five categories of managerial behavior that affect

employees' trust in their managers: (a) behavioral consistency, (b) acting with integrity, (c) sharing and delegation of control, (d) demonstration of concern, and (e) openness of communication. The link between trust and this last category of behavior, open communication, has been demonstrated in numerous studies (e.g., Butler, 1991; Mellinger, 1956; Muchinsky, 1977; O'Reilly, 1977; O'Reilly & Roberts, 1974; 1977; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974a; 1974b; 1979; Yeager, 1978). By way of replication, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 5: Openness of communication will have a positive effect on trust.*

In studies 1 and 2, we hypothesized that cynicism would be negatively related to trust, arguing that cynicism influences individuals' perceptions of their experiences with others. In study 3, we further explored this argument by examining how cynicism affects interpretations of objectively manipulated behavior. Although we expect cynicism to influence the interpretations of others' behavior and thus negatively influence trust, we posit that the strength of this effect will depend on how ambiguous the behavior is. As noted above, research suggests a strong and consistent effect of open communication on trust. Open communication, or the lack thereof, can provide a strong signal of a person's trustworthiness (Whitener, et al. 1998; Lind & van den Bos, 2002). Indeed, individuals, regardless of their general cynicism, may find it difficult to discount strong and unambiguous cues (Ross & Nisbett, 1991): an extremely reticent or uncommunicative individual may appear suspicious to cynics and non-cynics alike, and an extremely open individual is likely to appear trustworthy to most people. However, when behavioral cues are relatively weak or ambiguous—i.e., a person is neither clearly open nor clearly uncommunicative—interpretations of such cues are likely to be subject to the perceptual biases of the observer (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). It is under this ambiguous circumstance that cynicism should have its strongest influence on trust. As in study 1 where individuals projected their (cynical) feelings

onto an ambiguous photograph, we expect a similar emergence and influence of cynicism on individuals' reactions to moderately open communication in study 3.

As suggested by study 2, we expect persons high in cynicism to have heightened vigilance, which may lead to selective attention to negative information about an ambiguous event. Robinson and Morrison (2000) argue that an employees' vigilance is likely to skew negative perceptions of organizational events when there is ambiguity surrounding the event. Moreover, theory (Andersson & Bateman, 1992; Dean et al., 1998; Gurtman, 1992; Wrightsman, 1992) and the findings of study 1 suggest that persons high in cynicism are more apt to have negative beliefs and feelings toward the target of cynicism about the target. This negativity is likely to influence their interpretation of weak cues or ambiguous information. Consistent with this view, we expect cynicism to have the strongest influence on perceptions when the cues are most ambiguous. Specifically, an individual who displays moderate levels of open communication is likely to be viewed as less trustworthy by persons high in cynicism than by those low in cynicism.

In short, we expect the openness of communication to affect the relationship between cynicism and trust. At the extremes, where behavioral cues are comparatively unambiguous, cynicism should have a relatively weak influence on trust. At moderate levels of open communication, cynicism should have a strong relationship to trust. We therefore hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 6: The negative relationship between cynicism and trust will be moderated by open communication such that the relationship will be stronger at moderate levels of communication than at either high or low levels of communication.*

### Study 3

#### *Method*

*Participants and procedure.* The data in Study 3 were collected as part of a daylong training session on “Managing Relationships” conducted with employees from the three credit unions described in Study 2. Training sessions took place at all three credit unions and a total of 65 managers participated; 30 managers acted as confederates (see below) and therefore 35 were actual research participants in the experiment. The experiment lasted approximately 30 minutes. At the beginning of the session, the experimenter introduced the group decision task, divided participants into subgroups of 5-8 people, and distributed materials so that participants were randomly assigned to conditions in the experiment. In all cases, the experimenter had advance access to participant lists and made the random assignments prior to the session. Following the exercise, participants were debriefed and managerial implications of trust and trustworthy behavior, particularly the role of open communication, were discussed.

*Design and manipulations.* A 3 x 2 mixed design was used, with openness of communication (high, moderate, and low) as the within-subjects factor and cynicism (high versus low) as the between-subjects factor. Openness of communication was manipulated by providing constraints on information sharing to select members of the participant groups. Specifically, in each group of participants, three individuals were randomly selected to be unwitting confederates of the experiment and were given a set of instructions regarding the sharing of confidential information. These individuals were naive confederates and unaware of the hypotheses. The remaining group members served as research participants. Confederates were instructed to either: (a) always share the confidential information immediately (high openness condition), (b) wait for the other party to share information before sharing the confidential information (moderate openness condition), or (c) never share the confidential information at all (low openness condition). Each group had one member in each of these

conditions, so that the research participants in each group were exposed to all three levels of communication. In all, there were 30 individuals who acted as naïve confederates (3 per group) and 35 who were research participants.

*Experimental task.* The task was specifically designed for the training session although it was loosely patterned after a combination of a murder mystery task, commonly used in group decision making studies (e.g., Stasser & Stewart, 1992), and a “speed dating” process. Specifically, it involved a decision making task in which each person received one clue and engaged in a series of very brief one-on-one conversations with others in the group in an effort to gather clues and solve the mystery. Each conversation lasted approximately 2 minutes and all participants changed partners at the same time as cued by the experimenter. Only by combining the totality of clues could a person successfully guess the perpetrator and solve the mystery, which simulated a “who done it” crime game. The goal of the exercise was for each individual to synthesize the various clues dispersed throughout the group and decide “who done it.” The first person to correctly identify the perpetrator won the game; if wrong, however, the person was excused from the exercise and his or her clue was passed on to another person in the group. (Participants were able to offer a guess only after a set number of one-on-one encounters, which was 4-6 depending on the size of the group. This constraint was necessary so that participants encountered the 3 confederates.) The structure of the exercise made it impossible for any single person to correctly identify the perpetrator without gathering information from others. Sample clues included “Not Lee or Bob, maybe Evan,” “Either Blair or Marco,” and “Not Cindy, maybe Ellen.” Only by openly sharing clues could the correct perpetrator be identified. If information is not shared, the problem becomes difficult, if not impossible to solve.

*Measures.* Cynicism was measured by Kanter & Mirvis's (1989) 6-item scale. This self-assessment was made as part of the larger survey, which was administered approximately 8 weeks prior to the experiment. Coefficient alpha for this sample was .85. Interpersonal trust was measured using two items adapted from Butler's Conditions of Trust Inventory (1991); participants rated each group member (including the three confederates) using a 7-point Likert-type scale. Coefficient alpha for this sample was .83 overall and .71, .93, and .77 for the low, moderate and high openness conditions, respectively. The manipulation check was a 2 item, 7-point Likert-type scale measuring participants' perceptions of openness of each confederate. Coefficient alpha for this sample was .89 overall and .75, .91, and .83 for the low, moderate and high openness conditions, respectively. A significant one-way repeated measures ANOVA on the manipulation check supported the efficacy of the openness manipulation ( $F_{2,66} = 17.75$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $M_{low} = 4.45$ ,  $SD_{low} = 1.60$ ;  $M_{moderate} = 5.10$ ,  $SD_{moderate} = 1.61$ ;  $M_{high} = 6.00$ ,  $SD_{high} = 1.11$ ).

### *Results*

Because our hypotheses are predicated on the previously obtained relationship between cynicism and trust, we first examined this relationship. Both the Pearson correlation coefficient between trust and cynicism ( $r = -.47$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the regression of trust on cynicism ( $B = -.26$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $t = -2.51$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were negative and significant, providing support for the presumed relationship.

We tested our hypotheses using a 3 x 2 mixed ANOVA with openness of communication as the within subjects factor and cynicism (based on a median split) as the between subjects factor. These results are summarized in Table 4. Hypothesis 5 predicted that openness of communication would have a positive effect on trust, which was supported by a significant main effect of our independent variable, open communication, on trust. Specifically, participants were



generally more trusting to the extent that targets were open in their communication ( $F_{2,66} = 4.82$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $M_{low} = 5.31$ ,  $SD_{low} = 1.34$ ;  $M_{moderate} = 5.62$ ,  $SD_{moderate} = 1.34$ ;  $M_{high} = 6.06$ ,  $SD_{high} = .87$ ).

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Insert Table 4 about here

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We predicted in Hypothesis 6 that the negative relationship between trust and cynicism would be moderated by open communication. As indicated in Table 4, this hypothesis was supported by the significant interaction between open communication and cynicism,  $F_{2,66} = 6.81$ ,  $p < .01$ . Figure 1 illustrates this interaction. As predicted, high and low cynics did not differ in their trust in the low and high openness conditions (both  $p$ 's  $> .10$ ), but high cynics were significantly less trusting than low cynics in the moderate openness condition,  $F_{1,22} = 23.05$ ,  $p < .01$ .

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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### *Discussion*

The purpose of study 3 was to elaborate and clarify the findings of studies 1 and 2: that cynicism influences perceptions of interactions with others and, consequently affects trust in others. We were specifically interested in the effect of others' behavior on the relationship between cynicism and trust. Using an experimental paradigm, we controlled the behavior participants were exposed to and gauged their reactions as a function of their cynicism. We manipulated one aspect of trustworthy behavior—open communication—and measured both

perceptions of trustworthy behavior and also trust judgments made by participants who varied in terms of cynicism.

There were two main findings. First, across the board, trust judgments corresponded to variations in trustworthy behavior: greater openness led to greater trust. As predicted, participants relied on behavior and experiences with others when assessing their trustworthiness. Second, the negative relationship between trust and cynicism was moderated by open communication. When others' behavior was unambiguously open or not, high and low cynics did not differ in their perceptions. However, when behavior was moderately open, cynicism was negatively related to participants' trust. These findings suggest that, as in Study 1, participants in Study 3 faced an ambiguous context in the case of moderate openness, which allowed differences between high and low cynics to surface and shape their trust judgments.

### General Discussion

Cynicism has taken hold of increasingly large numbers of employees in the US (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006), creating an imposing barrier for managers who want to develop trust in their relationships with their employees. The purpose of these three studies was to examine the nature of cynicism, its relationship to employees' trust in their managers, and how managers' behavior might influence the impact of cynicism on trust. Our core proposition was that cynicism represents an a priori attitude that influences individuals' attention to aspects of the social environment as well as their interpretations of interactions with others. This cynical orientation or mindset colors perceptions of actual events, which in turn affect trust. We further proposed that this process is most likely when situational cues are weak or ambiguous. Specifically, when the words and actions of others are clearly trustworthy or clearly untrustworthy, cynicism will have little relationship to perceptions of trust. It is primarily when

behavior is ambiguous that the cynical mindset comes into play. The findings of three studies employing very different methodologies support this core proposition.

Using a projective task, we tested the first facet of this proposition in Study 1: that cynicism involves negative affect and cognitions regarding anticipated interactions with others (i.e., negative beliefs about group members, negative feelings toward the group, and negative expectations about group performance). Our results were consistent with this proposition. We found that cynicism toward work groups was related to negative feelings and negative beliefs. These findings suggest that cynics' perceptions of their encounters with others are colored by their feelings and beliefs, and that interpretations of these experiences in turn affect trust in the target.

We moved into the field for Study 2 and focused on the linkages among cynicism, trust, and perceptions of work experiences. We examined the extent to which employees' cynicism related to their perceptions of met expectations, and ultimately to their trust in their managers. As predicted, perceptions of met expectations mediated the negative relationship between cynicism and trust. That is, individuals higher in cynicism were less likely to perceive that their expectations were met and less likely to trust their managers. These results provided preliminary evidence of the relationship between cynicism, perceptions and trust. However, the survey methodology could not measure the contribution of several important components of the trust-building process, particularly the role of actual experiences in the workplace.

We therefore conducted Study 3, an experiment in which we manipulated actual experiences. As predicted, results showed that across the board, managers' trustworthy behavior positively affected trust judgments, and that when behavior was unambiguously trustworthy (or not), both high and low cynics expressed high (or low) levels of trust. Also as predicted,

cynicism negatively affected trust judgments in the moderate, more ambiguous condition. High cynics apparently interpreted individuals' guarded or moderate openness negatively, and made significantly lower trust judgments than did low cynics. Not unlike the psychological projection paradigm used in Study 1, when faced with ambiguous cues, cynicism seemed to influence participants' perceptions leading to significantly different levels of trust.

In sum, all three studies support the notion that cynicism is negatively related to favorable interpretations of people or events, and consequently, negatively related to trust. As such, this investigation represents an advance in our understanding of the nature of cynicism as an attitude, and the processes underlying its effects. One important implication of our findings is that cynicism does not appear to involve psychological disengagement. Lay intuition may suggest that cynics are detached and inattentive, believing that outcomes of interactions are a foregone conclusion not requiring much thought or sensemaking. However, our findings portray a quite different dynamic. In fact, they suggest that persons possessing cynical attitudes might be the most vigilant, albeit biased, of individuals.

Given the importance of trust to various organizational process and outcomes (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; 2002), the negative relationship between cynicism and trust can be a destructive force in organizations. However, the results of Study 3 suggest a potential route by which managers can counter the negative bias of cynics: Strong and unambiguous cues by the manager signaling his or her trustworthiness may override the effects of cynicism on trust. This finding underscores the importance of managerial trustworthy behavior (Whitener, et al., 1998) in building trusting relationships, particularly with the large number of employees who are cynical.

The findings of each study are limited by the projective aspects of the study conducted with a student sample (Study 1), the cross-sectional nature of our survey (Study 2), and the small

sample size in our experiment (Study 3). However, the consistent pattern of results across the three studies, which involved different methodologies and settings lends creditability to our core propositions. On the other hand, none of the studies were longitudinal. There is a need to study trust development over time—measuring attitudes and dispositions, observing behavior, and manipulating interventions—to more deeply understand the underlying processes associated with cynicism and the ways in which managers can engender trust. Another concern common to all three studies is that cynicism was a measured variable, which limits our ability to draw causal inferences regarding the impact of cynicism on perception and trust. However, it should be noted that use of an experimental manipulation of trustworthiness in Study 3, provides greater confidence in causal inference for some relationships. Nonetheless, further research is needed on the causal relationships between cynicism and trust, and the potential reciprocal influences.

Researchers should also investigate the stability of cynicism over time and across situations. Consistent with current research on cynicism in organizations, we focused on cynicism as an attitude. Although some research suggests that job attitudes are relatively stable (Staw; & Ross, 1985; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), attitudes are generally considered to be changeable. Thus, the influence of work experiences on cynicism over time warrants further investigation, particularly in light of the findings of Study 3, which suggest that strong behavioral cues may eclipse the relationship between cynicism and trust. Further, although cynicism has primarily been viewed as a state in organizational research, personality psychologists (e.g., Wrightsman, 1992) have also proposed that it may be a trait or stable disposition. Further research on the relationship between the trait and state, and the etiology of the construct are needed.

Our results also expose another potentially fruitful avenue of research in exploring the role of attributions in the psychological dynamics of cynicism and trust. The results of Study 2 imply, as suggested by Wanous, et al. (2004), that attributions may play an important role in trust development. If a manager is held responsible for an unfortunate organizational event, particularly one not of his or her doing, this may undermine trust already established through a history of trustworthy behavior (e.g., open communication). Research by Korsgaard, Brodt and Whitener (2002) begins to explore this possibility but further research is needed. A greater understanding of attributions could help executives better understand the basis for being accused of untrustworthiness, such as those befuddled executives described at the beginning of this article who hope for trust while at the same time engendering cynicism.

Finally, to fully understand the role cynicism plays in organizations, scholars need to explore the behavioral consequences of cynicism. As an attitude, cynicism can be construed as having a behavioral component, such as the tendency toward disparaging and critical behavior (Dean, et al., 1998). Our research focused on cynicism's relationship to trust, which has an established link to important organizational behaviors, including communication, performance, and organizational citizenship behavior (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). By way of extension, cynicism's relationship to these behavioral outcomes may be indirect through its link to trust. In addition to negative behavioral consequences, cynicism may have benefits, which should be explored. Our findings that suggest heightened vigilance, or a 'trust but verify' stance on the part of persons high in cynicism, may represent a functional orientation for individuals to possess especially during times of high uncertainty and ambiguity (Dean, et al., 1998; Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998).

This paper explored the nature of cynicism and its relationship to interpersonal trust, and how behavior might influence the impact of cynicism on trust. We proposed that cynicism represents an attitude, composed of negative beliefs, feelings, and expectations, that colors individuals' perceptions of events and behavior, especially when situational cues are ambiguous. These perceptions in turn affect trust. Three diverse studies (projective test with student subjects, field survey of credit union employees, and experiment with credit union managers) investigate this proposition. We found that cynicism represents negative feelings toward a target, is associated with unfavorable interpretations of ambiguous events and behavior, and is negatively related to trust. However, we also found that strong trustworthy behavior mitigates the relationship between cynicism and trust in a way that may counter cynicism and engender trust. Future research should explore further the roles of cynicism in interpreting events and behavior and influencing trust and of trustworthy behavior in weakening the effect of cynicism on trust.

## Footnote

To provide empirical evidence of the divergent validity of cynicism and trust, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on a set of scales assessing cynicism and trust. Specifically, we administered four scales varying in specific and content to 224 undergraduate business students at business school in the southeastern US. We included the two cynicism measures employed in the current investigations -- cynicism about groups (adapted from Wanous, et al., 2000) and general cynicism (Kantor & Mirvis, 1989). The remaining two scales were measures of trust, one being a specific assessment of trust in manager (Butler, 1991), which was also employed in the current investigations, and the other being a general measure of trust in people (Rosenberg, 1957). To assess convergence of measures of trust and cynicism, we compared a single-factor solution (i.e., measures of trust and cynicism loading on the same factor) to a two-factor solution consisting of separate trust and cynicism factors. The findings indicated that the two-factor model was significantly superior to the single factor model (two factor:  $\chi^2_{229} = 947.74, p < .01$ ; one-factor:  $\chi^2_{230} = 1625.95, p < .01$ ;  $\chi^2_{\text{diff}} = 678.20, p < .01$ ). However, the two factor model did not provide a good fit ( $agf = .56$ ;  $nfi = .59$ ;  $RMRS = .13$ ). Therefore, we compared it to a four factor model distinguishing not only between constructs (cynicism and trust), but between levels of specificity (general vs. specific measures). This model provided acceptable fit ( $agi = .80$ ;  $nfi = .79$ ;  $RMRS = .063$ ;  $\chi^2_{224} = 484.10, p < .01$ ) and was significantly better than the two-factor model ( $\chi^2_{\text{diff}} = 678.20, p < .01$ ). To rule out the possibility that these findings were merely indicating the differences between levels of specificity, we also estimated a two-factor model distinguishing between general and specific measures. This model produced a poor fit ( $agi = .80$ ;  $nfi = .79$ ;  $RMRS = .063$ ;  $\chi^2_{224} = 484.10, p < .01$ ).



.01). and was significantly inferior to the four-factor model. A complete description of these results is available from the first author.

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Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations for all Variables in Study 1*

Variable	Mean	Std	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Sex <sup>a</sup>	0.52	0.5						
2. Age	20.43	1.81	0.11					
3. Non-Minority <sup>b</sup>	0.66	0.48	0.03	0.05				
4. Cynicism	2.56	0.93	0.08	0.10	0.01			
5. Negative Beliefs	1.99	0.67	0.04	-0.03	-0.03	0.17*		
6. Negative Expectations	2.19	0.62	-.00	-0.01	0.00	0.18*	0.79*	
7. Trust in Group	4.36	1.61	-.010	-0.16*	0.00	-0.53*	-0.15*	-0.17*

Note: N=208

<sup>a</sup> Sex is coded 1= male, 0=female.<sup>b</sup> Non-minority is coded 1= Caucasian, 0 = Other.

\*p&lt;.05



Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics in Study 2*

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Sex <sup>a</sup>	0.26	0.44	--				
2. Tenure with Manager	2.31	3.07	-.21*	--			
3. Cynicism	4.11	1.10	.05	-.08	(.85)		
4. Trust in the Manager	5.58	1.71	-.01	-.06	-.19*	(.94)	
5. Met Expectations	5.14	1.31	.04	.11	-.20*	.53*	(.87)

Note: (N=242). Scale reliabilities are shown along the diagonal.

<sup>a</sup> Sex is coded 1= male, 0=female.

\*p<.05



Table 3

*Regression analyses for Study 2*

Variable	Dependent Variable											
	Column A						Column B					
	Met Expectations						Trust in the Manager					
	Step 1			Step 2			Step 1			Step 2		
	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Constant	5.08	.12	44.24**	6.19	.34	18.31**	7.07	.433	16.30**	3.13	.59	5.27**
Sex	-.22	.20	-1.09	-.24	.19	-1.23	.002	.25	.01	.15	.22	.71
Tenure w/ Manager	.05	.03	1.87	.05	.03	1.68	-.04	.04	-1.08	-.07	.03	-2.18*
Cynicism				-.27	.08	-3.51**	-.33	.10	-3.41**	-.16	.09	-1.87
Met Expectations										.64	.07	8.57**
R <sup>2</sup>	.02			.07			.05			.28		
F	1.99			5.50**			4.12**			22.45**		
$\Delta R^2$				.05						.23		
F for $\Delta R^2$				5.50**						73.49**		

Note: (N=230) \*p&lt;.05 \*\*p&lt;.01

Table 4

*2-Way Mixed ANOVA (Openness by Cynicism) on Trust, (Study 3)*

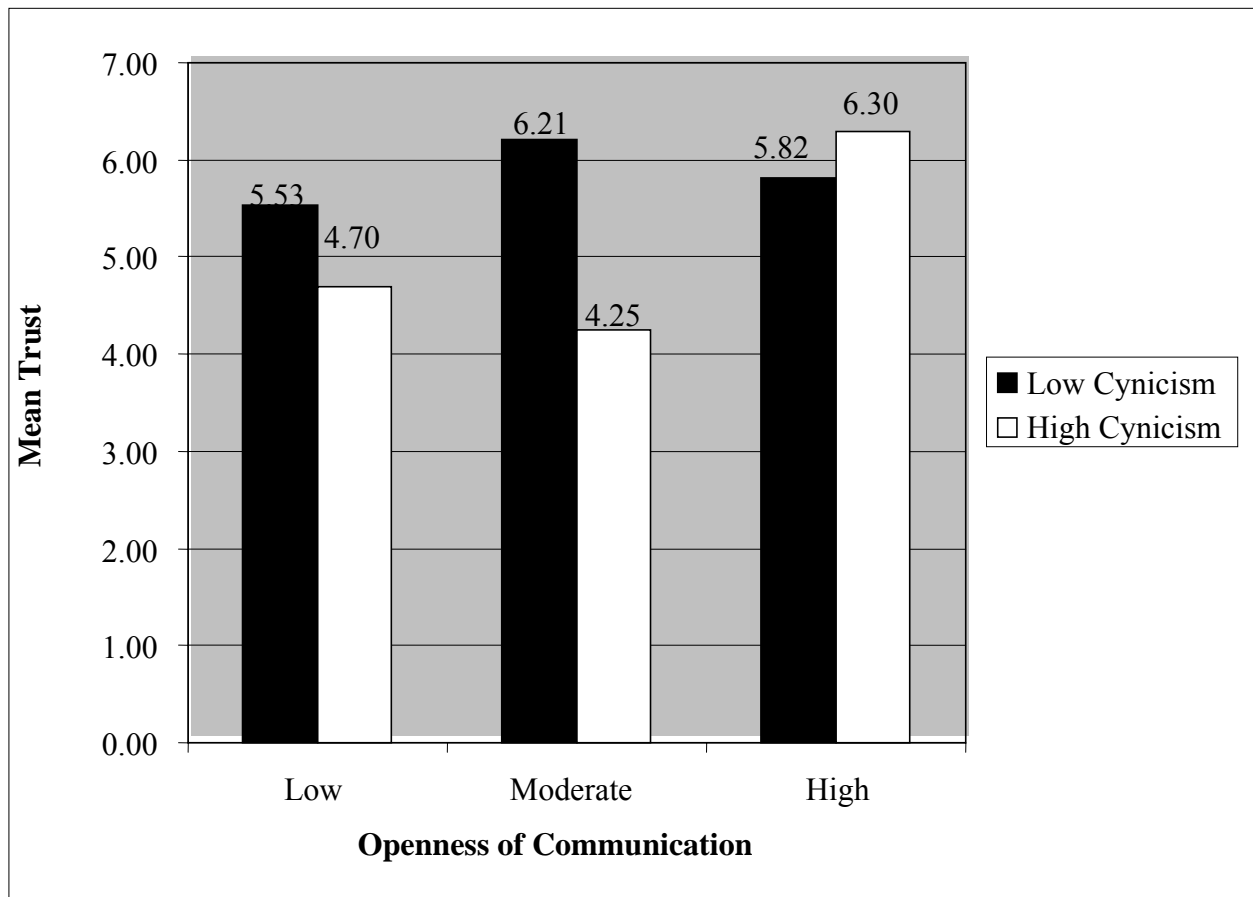
Within Subjects ANOVA	MS	MS error	F	df
Openness	6.18	1.28	4.82**	2,66
Openness X Cynicism	8.72	1.28	6.81**	2,66
<hr/>				
Between Subjects ANOVA	MS	MS error	F	df
Low Openness Condition				
Cynicism	4.07	1.85	2.20	1,22
Moderate Openness Condition				
Cynicism	22.50	.97	23.05**	1,22
High Openness Condition				
Cynicism	1.33	.56	2.37	1,22

Note: For these analyses, cynicism was classified as high ( $\geq 3.9$ ) or low ( $< 3.9$ ).

\*\* $p < .01$

Figure 1.

*Mean Trust for High and Low Cynics by Openness of Communication (Study 3)*



## Appendix

### Instructions

In the photograph below you see students working on a group project. Examine the photograph carefully looking at each of the students and create a story about what they are doing, thinking and feeling, what led up to the scene portrayed, and how it will end. As instructed below, write your story underneath the photograph. *There is no right or wrong answer in this task.*

